

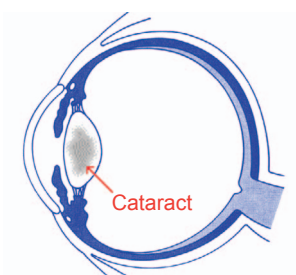
Sight Matters

FAQ Sheets

Cataract

Effect on the Eye

Cataract is an opacity or clouding of the natural lens inside the eye. This clouding can distort light as it enters the eye - thus affecting the vision.

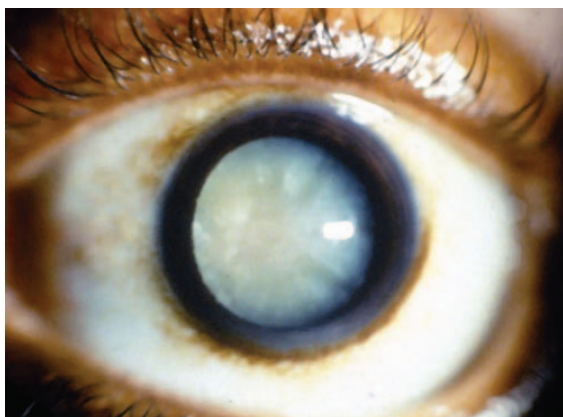


An example of cloudy vision due to cataract

Risk Factors

Cataracts can occur at any age, but 90% of cases are caused by the ageing process. Approximately half the population over 60 has some degree of cataract and almost everybody over 70.

Cataract is the largest cause of blindness in the world and the incidence is increased by ultra-violet (UV) radiation, smoking, eye injury, other eye diseases, steroids and diabetes.



Example of cataract in the lens of the eye

Symptoms

The symptoms of cataract may include a gradual painless decrease in vision, a haziness in the vision, an increased sensitivity to glare or even double vision.

Vision is particularly reduced in low light (like night driving), colours are dulled and the disabling effects of glare are increased. There is also a shift in the vision towards more short-sightedness (myopia), or less long-sightedness (hyperopia), so near vision may improve while long distance vision is poorer.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis consists of having regular eye examinations to enable early detection of possible problems.

Eye examinations should usually be every 2 years for patients over 40 years of age; and every 12 months for those over 70.

Prevention

The best advice for prevention is to avoid the known risk factors. Eye protection from ultra-violet radiation should be routine and this can be achieved with UV-blocking sunglasses and special UV filters in clear spectacle lenses. Smoking should also be avoided.

Treatment

Special tints in the spectacle lenses can improve vision and reduce the symptoms of cataract in the early stages. Adding a UV filter can also often slow the development of this condition.

Once cataract has developed to the degree where it is having a significant effect on the vision the eventual and only treatment is a surgical removal of the lens from inside the eye.

The natural lens is then usually replaced with an artificial lens for the eye called an intra-ocular lens (or IOL).